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ABSTRACT

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Evangelism and Learning: Learning Theory Considerations in Evangelism

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Abstract

Five prescriptions for evangelism are offered from five different schools of thought in educational psychology. Since understanding and the integration of truth are a central theme in evangelism, how do humans process truth? This article constructs hypothetical evangelistic scenarios according to behaviorist, cognitive processing, interactivist, biological, and constructivist theories of learning. Which model best represents how evangelism ought to be conducted?

Evangelism and Learning

What if Christian conversion could be accomplished through a neural transplant or simply by taking a pill? Biological learning theorists would not consider such a notion impossible in the future. A cognitive theorist might claim conversion is eminent when short-term memory comes under God's influence. Different schools of learning would prescribe different remedies for redeeming the non-believer. What should a conscientious evangelical Christian do?

For nearly two-thousand years Christians throughout the world have tried to identify reliable means for transmitting the knowledge of God and spiritual truths to non-believers. This transmission process has come to be known as "evangelism" and refers to the steps one takes to get a non-Christian to seek a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Evangelical Christians are those who have a zeal for evangelism. Every evangelism program in our churches today makes some assumption about how humans assimilate the truth of the Gospel of Christ. Are our assumptions in harmony with our theology?

Psychology of Learning

Most would agree to some degree that evangelism involves learning about Christ. Therefore, how humans learn becomes a worthy consideration as one contemplates effective evangelism. Theories of learning are numerous and flow from one's personal philosophy and worldview. To what degree do modern evangelism techniques agree with Christians assumptions regarding an individual's ability to respond to God's invitation? All learning theories prescribe means to reach a given end based upon assumptions about human capabilities and philosophical or theological perspectives.

Christian evangelism attempts to impart spiritual and moral truth to learners. The initial aims of evangelical Christianity are mental acquiescence to God's existence, initiation or acceptance of a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and living a morally upright life. Christianity's distinctiveness is in its beliefs about Jesus Christ and the

Bible. Within the Christian faith diversity abounds and is expressed through various denominations.

Inherent in a Christian worldview is the belief that every individual is the sum of body, mind, and spirit. Religious education assumes spiritual and moral growth can come to the spirit through the education of the mind and the training of the body. "Unlearned" insights are often considered to be spiritual revelations. In spite of these three distinct elements, the Hebrew tradition handed down through the Bible refers to humans as "souls" in which the body, mind, and spirit are interdependent and inseparable. Most evangelicals agree that what happens in one part of the individual influences the remaining parts. In Western Christianity the term, "heart" is used to refer to the seat of one's spirit or will. The heart controls and directs the soul. Evangelicals believe the Christian life begins when sin is confessed and Christ is invited to control one's heart.

Hypothetical Evangelism Scenarios

What does your evangelism technique say about what you believe about how people learn? Are you a behaviorist or a constructivist? Several hypothetical evangelism scenarios will help demonstrate how various learning theories influence evangelism. An examination of evangelism requires a few definitions. For the sake of clarity the desired end of evangelism will be described in observable terms when possible. This should not be construed as the negation of inner workings, but the admission of our inability to accurately discern such accurately. The term, "seeker" will refer to an imaginary non-believer who is to be evangelized. The "evangelist" will be the person who is attempting to convert the non-believer. Each of the following five sections will develop hypothetical evangelism scenarios based upon various learning theories.

Section I: Behaviorism

Behaviorist theory is rooted in the research of Ivan Pavlov, E. L. Thorndike, and B. F. Skinner (McCown & Roop, 1992). Pleasure and pain are the backbone of behavioral theory. Behaviorists are interested in the way pleasure and painful

consequences shape behavior over time. Learning is defined as changes in behavior that from experiences (Lefrancois, 1991).

Behaviorists attempt to define all human behavior in terms of *stimulus* and *response* (S-R) (Slavin, 1991). All actions or responses are the result of some stimulus. A given behavior takes place in order to attain something pleasurable or to avoid something painful. Reinforcement through reward and punishment *condition* learners to perform defined tasks. Learners are narrowly defined as stimulus processing machines. Animals and humans may be conditioned in the same way to perform a given behavior through the application of the appropriate stimulus. Skinner maintained the environment is the master controller of animals and humans (Sprinthall & Sprinthall, 1990).

Mental and spiritual processes are not addressed by the behaviorist because such processes are neither measurable nor observable. Failure to address mental and spiritual processes, combined with a marked reliance upon animal research and evolutionary theory, have resulted in behaviorists being classified by many evangelicals as secular humanists who equate humans with animals. Some might assume radical behaviorists are anti-religionists who deny the spirituality of humanity. Because of ideological conflicts with mainstream Christianity, the premeditated use of radical behaviorism as a means of spurring spiritual growth in the church should be questioned.

Since the turn of the twentieth century behaviorism has become deeply entrenched in public education. Behavior modification has been used effectively in many educational and institutional settings (McCown & Roop, 1992). Systems utilizing rewards and punishment as the primary means of teaching are following a behaviorist model. As a result, behaviorist patterns have unobtrusively become an important aspect of American society.

General Theory

Behaviorism attempts to strengthen positive behavior and weaken negative behavior through reinforcement and punishment. Positive or negative reinforcement takes

place when a pleasing (positive) stimulus is given or a displeasing (negative) stimulus is removed contingent upon a positive response. Positive and negative reinforcements strengthen behaviors. Punishment (displeasing stimulus) can take the form of actual pain, time out, or a response cost (penalty). These weaken negative behaviors.

A contingency schedule of punishment or reward is developed by the instructor to shape, chain or eliminate behavior. Once the desired behavior has been established or a negative behavior eliminated the instructor seeks to minimize stimulus while maintaining appropriate behavior.

Behavioral change follows a five-step program (Driscoll, 1994). The first step involves setting behavioral goals. Step two determines appropriate reinforcers. The third step outlines procedures for changing the behavior. Step four implements procedures and records results. Step five evaluates progress and determines if program revision is advisable.

Behaviorism and Christianity

Because behaviorism denies mental and spiritual aspects a specific measurable behavior must be targeted for change. A hypothetical evangelistic scenario couched in behavioral terms would likely assume the ultimate goal of Christianity to be a physical action. Many evangelicals, like behaviorists, base perceptions of success upon seeker's actions. Most would argue that the non-believer indicates having become a Christian when he or she verbally prays a prayer including confession and a request for Christ to enter their heart.

The behaviorist would consider the seeker's thoughts and impressions of no concern because they are unknowable. However, the action of praying aloud would be a plausible goal because it is an observable behavior. For the purposes of the hypothetical scenario the goal of a verbalized prayer to receive Christ will be the target behavior.

Scenario I

A nine-year-old, third grader named John will be the hypothetical seeker in this scenario. John does not exhibit any prayer behavior. The evangelist must first teach John to do prayer behavior and then get him to pray a prayer containing vocabulary relating to receiving Christ. The evangelist exposes John to the phenomenon of prayer by having another third grader named Jill pray in his presence.

The evangelist observes John as Jill prays. What reinforcers will be most likely to stimulate John to pray? When Jill prays John merely watches. He notices Jill bows her head and closes her eyes when she prays. Upon completing her prayer Jill raises her head, opens her eyes, and smiles at the evangelist. The evangelist pats Jill on the back and tells her she is "good girl" and that she will "go to heaven someday." John smiles when he sees Jill receive praise and says, "I want to go to heaven someday, too!"

The evangelist assumes John knows what prayer behavior, i.e., bowed head, closed eyes, and speech directed toward God, looks like because he has seen Jill pray. If this is not true, the evangelist will have to revise the program and teach prayer behavior. The evangelist reasons prayer behavior can be reinforced with praise and the promise of a heavenly reward and punished through condemnation and the threat of hell. For example, when John exhibits *any* prayer behavior the evangelist will pat him on the back and say, "John, you are a good boy! If you ask Jesus to forgive your sins and come into your hear, you will go to heaven someday!" If John does not pray, the evangelist will say, "John, you are a bad boy! If you do not ask Jesus to forgive your sins and come into your heart you will go to hell someday." If John prays asking Jesus to forgive his sins and come into his heart, the evangelist will pat him on the back and say, "John, you are a good boy! You are going to heaven someday!"

Evangelist: "John, would you please pray and ask Jesus to forgive your sins and come into your heart?"

John: "No, I don't want to."

Evangelist: "John, you are being a bad boy! If you do not pray and ask Jesus to forgive your sins and come into your heart, you will go to hell."

John: "I don't want to go to hell. I'll try to pray. (John bows his head and closes his eyes) Thank you God for today, Amen."

Evangelist (patting John on the back): "John, you are a good boy! If you ask Jesus to forgive your sins and come into your heart, you will go to heaven someday!"

John: "Will I go to heaven now?"

Evangelist: If you ask Jesus to forgive your sins and come into your heart, you will go to heaven someday." (Similar exchanges occur. The evangelist keeps track of John's progress and continues to respond according the designed program.)

John: "I want to pray (bows his head and closes his eyes). Jesus, please forgive my sins and come into my heart. Amen."

Evangelist: John, you are a good boy! You are going to heaven someday!"

The evangelist concludes he has achieved his goal. He further decides to revise his program. Whenever John prays the evangelist will say, "John, you are a good boy! If you are in church this weekend I'll give you some candy!"

Discussion

Behaviorism is often successful in altering behavior when the learner is controlled by external stimulus. Those who have no internal control depend upon situational factors and contextual cues to dictate behavior. Younger children are particularly vulnerable to this type of behavioral conditioning.

Most evangelicals would probably argue that behavioral change is not enough to qualify one as a Christian. Evangelicals vehemently contend a relationship with God comes through inner faith in God's grace, not through actions. Many conservative evangelicals likely find this scenario shallow and distasteful.

Correct external behavior without corresponding mental and spiritual assertions fail to ascertain one's spiritual condition. In so concluding evangelicals dismiss

behaviorism as incompatible with basic Christian beliefs. If such a conclusion is made, evangelicals would do well to examine other instances in which behaviorism appears in the church such as rewards for Sunday School attendance, reciting memory verses, and deacon selection based upon contributions. Most instances of, "do this to receive that," are based upon behavioral principles.

Before evangelicals roundly condemn behaviorism some consideration might be given to the purpose and function of the law the predecessor of grace in the Bible. An argument might be put forth that because of humanity's lack of internal control or motivation God is forced to rely upon behavioral methods to shape and prepare seekers for the grace offered in Jesus Christ. Human experience indicates rules, rewards, and punishments precede understanding and maturity. It is insightful to observe that dogmatic legalism finds its roots in behaviorism while grace searches for something morally higher and beyond stimulus and response.

Behaviorism's strength is in its ability to accurately change and shape behaviors through an organized program of reinforcement or punishment. Its greatest weakness is in its inability to directly address motivational, mental, and spiritual issues. Are inappropriate behavioral programs evident in modern Christianity? Consider ways in which Christians have been conditioned to respond to certain stimuli. Religious educators must consider instructional strategies they use and the goals they wish to meet. Does one become a Christian as the result of conditioned responses to situational stimulus or based upon internal belief in spiritual principles and convictions? Perhaps both are appropriate in their due season.

Section II: Cognitive Learning

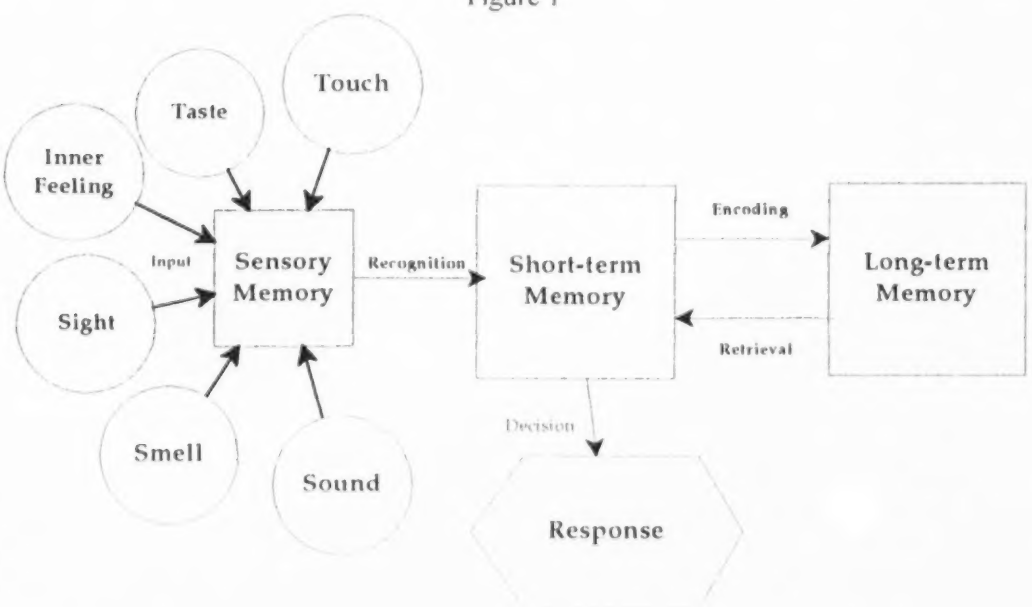
Unlike behaviorism, cognitive psychologists attempt to address the internal processes that are at work in humans. Evangelicals may find cognitive processing more palatable because it does not implicitly exclude the notion of spirit. Cognitive theory further assumes all bits of information are cataloged and linked in various manners in the

brain. Cognitive instruction builds upon existing knowledge through associations and experiences (Ornstein & Levine, 1993). This holistic approach is in harmony with the biblical concept of the human soul. Though observations of internal processes remain impossible, cognitivists frame theories based primarily upon *metacognition*, i.e., thinking about thinking (Benjafield, 1992).

General Theory

Cognitive theories are often represented through models. Figure 1 is a simple modal (two-part) model of cognitive information processing (Garnham, 1991). New information gains access to the learner's attention through the senses and *sensory memory*. The information is then placed in *short-term memory* for further use of discarded. Short-term memory encodes the new information and relays it into *long-term memory* for elaboration, construction of associations, and storage for future use. In decision making short-term memory accesses long-term memory to retrieve information upon which a response may be based.

Figure 1



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The senses link the human to the exterior world. Sensory memory appears to "flash" all sensory input to short-term memory. Sensory memory is fleeting and decays immediately if unattended (Driscoll, 1994). Selectivity is not an attribute of sensory memory. It simply passes on whatever comes in through the senses.

Short-term memory chooses to attend or ignore sensory input. Short-term memory's first activity, in conjunction with long-term memory, is to assign a value to incoming sensory inputs. Values might include urgency, danger, sorrow, humor, importance, empathy, and so on. Next, short-term memory decided what to do with the input. Some readily apparent choices include: associate with other information, store in long-term memory for future reference, respond to the environment in some fashion, a combination of the previous items, or discard. Short-term memory encodes the new information, passes it on to long-term memory, and then monitors long-term memory as it associates, stores, or retrieves information (Benjafield, 1992).

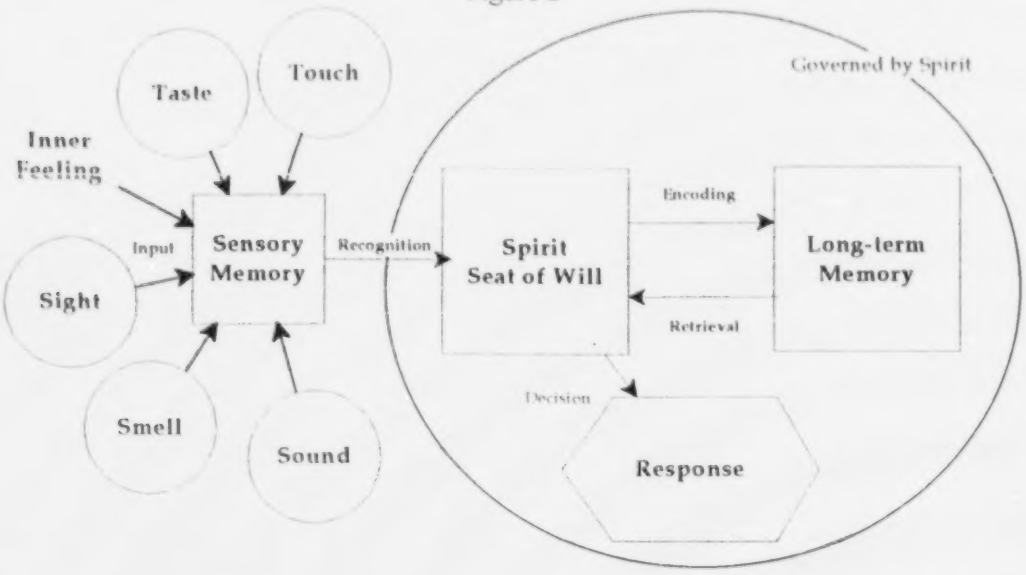
Most cognitive theorists agree long-term memory functions in two modes: conscious and unconscious. Some theorists suggest a their, subconscious mode (Benjafield, 1992). Speculation abounds on how long-term memory works. Most agree that information is stored in the brain according to a *schema*, or network. Items in long-term memory appear to be part of a vast, ordered network of associations. Though theorists discuss mental operations in abstract terms, these abstractions appear to have concrete roots in human physiology.

In cognitive information processing learning takes place as one's personal schema is expanded and new ideas are associated with old ideas in long-term memory. A schema may be expanded or reconstructed. Cognitive instruction often builds connections through repeated question-answer-teach episodes. If connections are not made in long-term memory, the new item is forgotten, i. e., discarded and not stored for further use. New items in short-term memory may *only* be discarded, rehearsed, or encoded for long-term memory storage.

Cognitive Theory and Christianity

An examination of cognitive processing from a Christian perspective suggests a need to define how the spirit relates to the various cognitive elements. Though other constructs are imaginable, evangelical theologians would likely place the spirit as the governor or overseer of all cognitive processes. The spirit mediates between the individual and the outside world. The spirit is the authority at the gate of consciousness. Therefore, that which evangelists call "spirit" closely equates with what cognitivists refer to as short-term memory (See Figure 2). Possible roles of the spirit might include, controller of system access, governor of short-term memory activities, and librarian of long-term memory.

Figure 2



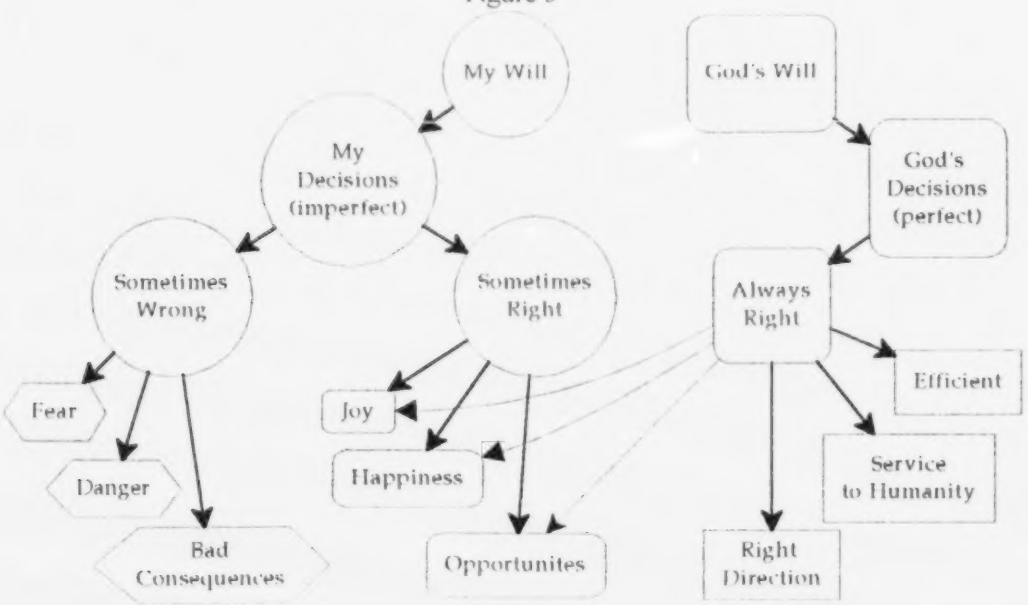
Most evangelicals agree a relationship with God begins when Christ is given control of one's heart. From a cognitive perspective the Christian "heart" functions roughly the same as short-term memory. A cognitive evangelistic prescription would attempt to reconstruct the seeker's personal values schema to the point where short-term memory is governed by Christian values. Since the term, "Christian values," is rather

nebulous it should be understood to mean the values and principles demonstrated and taught by Jesus Christ in the Bible. The seeker's personal cognitive governance schema must be displaced with a Christ-like governance schema. This may equate to the Christian concept of self-denial.

Cognitive Evangelism

The cognitive evangelist first attempts to enter the seeker's short-term memory by getting the seeker's attention. Second, through questions and answers, the evangelist probes the seeker's short-term and long-term memory for past mental governance mistakes attributable to a weak personal schema. Third, using the question-answer-teach method the evangelist uses examples, logic, and rationale to convince the seeker his or her cognitive governance system is inadequate (See Figure 3).

Figure 3



The evangelist attempts to build or expand the seeker's "God schema" to the point of placing it in control of cognitive functions. Step by step the evangelist ascertains, augments, and reconstructs the seeker's personal schemata about authority, governing principles, values, and various other issues as they relate to control of thinking. The

ultimate goal is to get the seeker to confess mistakes (sin) and to control their personal life. This may be effected by placing God or godly principles in charge of short-term memory.

In Christian parlance, God would come into the seeker's heart and take control. A cognitivist might describe this as the expansion of one's God schema to rule cognitive functions in short-term memory. The seeker would attempt to model Christ in cognitive processing activities, place values upon sensory input according to biblical principles, and store only God-approved items in long-term memory.

The seeker would be considered a Christian when he or she confessed an inability to govern properly. The seeker would further attempt to place God in control of all cognitive functions. As God is incorporated into personal life schemata the seeker will evidence thinking strategies and a lifestyle governed by Christian principles.

Scenario II

Jane is the evangelist and has a neighbor, Ann, who is a non-believer. Jane meets Ann outside one afternoon and attempts to lead her to become a Christian. After some small talk Jane begins:

Jane: "Ann, what do you think about Jesus?"

Ann: "I don't know. I've never thought about God much one way or the other."

Jane: "Have you ever felt like you needed Jesus in your life?"

Ann: "No, why should I? I don't like to go to church."

Jane: "There's a big difference between Jesus and going to church! Jesus is God's son and he loves you very much and wants you to have an abundant life. Did your parents love you when you were a child?"

Ann: "They sure did! I made all kinds of mistakes growing up, but they stuck by me."

Jane: "I guess if you had followed your parents advice back then you would have avoided a lot of problems, right? "

Ann: "I guess so, but I was immature and too head-strong to listen to them. I wish I had."

Jane: "Connect your understanding of your parents love to God and understand he loves you *more* than they do! If you'd have let your parents control your decisions more, you would have avoided problems. If you let God control your decisions now, he'll also help you avoid problems, *and* he'll give you eternal life! Would you like that?"

Ann: "I never thought of God that way. It makes sense. I wish I had the wisdom of God!"

Jane: "You can have it! If you place God in control of your life he will direct your ways. If you really want to exchange your wisdom for his, I can help you. How about it?"

Ann: "I need to know more about God and Jesus, but it sounds right to me. What do I need to do?"

Jane continues to probe and help Ann construct an understanding of God. Jane and Ann meet and discuss what it means to give God control of one's life. Finally, Ann decides to base her life and decisions upon the Bible and her perceptions of God's spirit speaking to her.

Discussion

Many evangelicals will insist that instead of a metacognitive change, a metaphysical change must take place in the seeker. Who's to say such is not the case? Perhaps both take place when the mind is surrendered to God. Instead of a change in cognitive principles, there is a change in governors. God, through his indwelling spirit, actually comes into the seeker's intellect and God's mind *replaces* the seeker's mind. This poses some thorny questions. How does one define an indwelling God? What is the nature of the spirit's connection to the intellect?

The Apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Romans stated, "...be transformed by the renewing of your minds....(Romans 12:2)" This verse from the New Testament would

seem to indicate that human minds may be transformed through mental renewal. The language used in this verse is in harmony with cognitive information theory. Christian teachers would do well to realize they are building upon existent cognitive schemata as they teach. Might the renewing of the mind be similar to cognitive evangelism?

Section III: Interactive Theory

Interactive philosophy has one foot in the idealist-realist camp while placing the other squarely in the existential camp. Reality may be objective and absolute, but humans have a limited capacity to perceive it uniformly. Thus, an individual's perception of absolute truth becomes unique and personalized through the influence of sociocultural factors. Human understanding of truth is tentative and may be both concrete and abstract.

Interactiional theory takes a pragmatic, sociocultural view of reality and the human experience. Humans learn and respond according to their experiences and the influences present in the environment. Interactional theorists believe learning precedes development. Various educational theories, when blended, yield the interactive model. The best aspects of the previous theories are integrated to form a hybrid, pragmatic theory this is profitably applied in education and other areas.

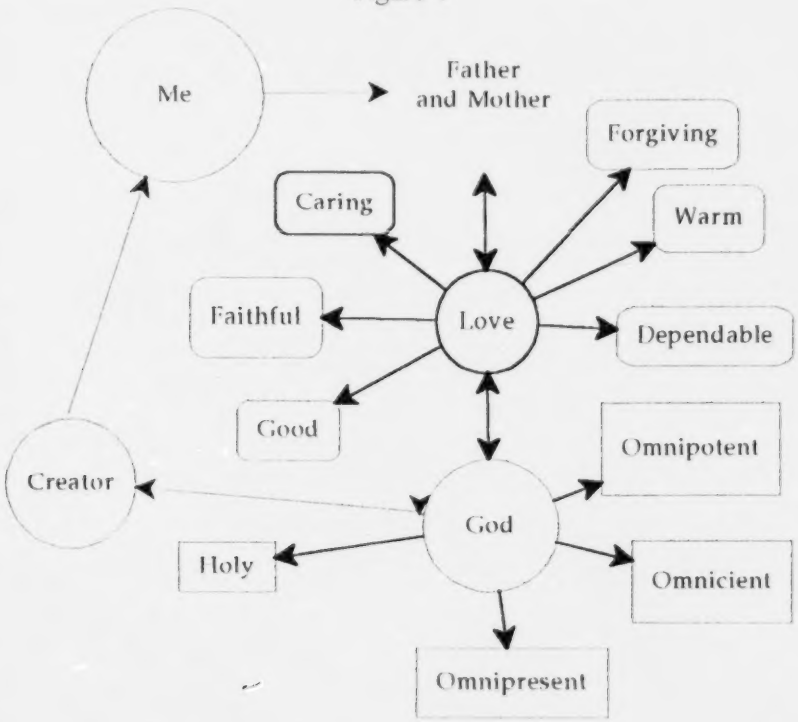
Theorists see the learner as the sum of personal history and sociocultural influences. The learning event is progressive and is defined as interaction between the learner and his or her environment. Sociocultural issues, environment, stimuli, cognitive processes, content, and the nature of the learner impact the learning event (Driscoll, 1994). Instruction balances the interaction of relevant elements.

General Theory

J. S. Bruner and L. S. Vygotsky are among the most notable interactional theorists. They were among the first educational psychologists to see learning experiences as interaction. Using reason, humans interact with their environment and their behavior responses are influenced by the degree to which they interact.

Interactional theories utilize cognitive terminology and models to elaborate upon mental processes involved in interaction. Vygotsky developed much of his interactive notions through analysis of egocentric speech patterns and schemata building among children (Benjafield, 1992). Individual schemata are produced through experiences that in mental associations. Each learner has a personal cognitive "machine" that functions according to its own rules and principles based upon the environment and experience. Cognitive maps may be constructed by each learner considering sociological influences (See Figure 4). The response of a given learner might make to a specific stimulus depends upon the learner's background and cognitive processes.

Figure 4



Behaviorism and interactional theories generally share an appreciation of environmental stimuli. Both theories concede the environment and experiences can significantly alter a learner's responses. Learner responses vary because each student is the sum of his or her experiences. These experiences are an indelible part of each learner.

Interactivist theory would agree that responses learner make are predicated upon experience, but would further propose that experience supplies the learner with a set of tools for reasoning before responding. The learner also has the ability to directly alter stimuli and responses. Vygotsky's idea of *mediation*, a cognitive process in which the learner changes the stimulus event as he or she responds to it is an excellent example of the blend between behavioral and cognitive theories (Driscoll, 1994)

Interactional theories propose the learner grows from the outside in as well as the inside out. Interaction requires the instruction to blend the nature of knowledge, the nature of the knower, and knowledge-acquisition process. Any insight that explains the phenomenon of learning more clearly is useful and worthy of consideration.

Differentiation is made between learning and developing. Theorists believe teaching and learning precede development. Education becomes a growth process in which an idea is planted and takes root in the individual over time. As the idea takes root the learner alters or adjusts cognitive schemata and develops according to what has been learned. The effects of learning typically appear sometime after learning.

Interaction and Christianity

Interactional theory would assume no two individuals may have an identical understanding of God or spiritual things. Each individual's interaction with God results in a unique relationship typified by unique spiritual understanding. Identical jargon and activities do not indicate identical faith.

Two people may discuss theology and the character of God, but agreement at best will always be "fuzzy" due to individual differences. Each individual has a unique theological perspective and a unique relationship with God based upon past sociocultural experiences. If spite of disparities in these perceptions, most are considered true and valid among Christians as long as the accepted vocabulary and forms are maintained.

Interactional theory does not reject absolute truth nor a singular reality. The idea of a loving God redeeming sinful humans would not prohibited in most interactional

theories. However, it would suggest each has a unique understanding and interpretation of what God, sin, and redemption represent in their world. Ultimately God may be singular and absolute, but individual perceptions of God will be various and tentative because of historical and cultural influences. Every person interacts with God in a unique manner.

A simple example of how interactional theory influences Christianity may be demonstrated by an individual's understanding of the concept of "God the Father." This concept is predicated upon a sociocultural understanding of the male leader's role in a family. One's understanding of God in this light will reflect personal experiences with fathers. The father concept is also in a constant state of transition. A child perceives fatherhood quite differently than an adult male with two or three offspring of his own. Those reared in a matriarchal society may be expected to have a very different view of fatherhood.

Because each person has a unique background or context for understanding spiritual truths, evangelism faces some definite challenges. Does the seeker understand the jargon being used? What is right, wrong, good, bad, or sin? Who are Jesus, Satan, and God? What do redemption, salvation, justification, sanctification and a host of other terms mean? What and where is heaven and hell?

Interactional Evangelism

Evangelism should seek interaction with the seeker. First between the evangelist and the seeker, then between the seeker and God, and finally between the seeker, God, and others. The goal of the evangelist in interactive evangelism might be to lead the seeker to interact with God in a manner such that a personal relationship result. The seeker should affirm salvation through Jesus Christ and demonstrate a proper understanding of Christian jargon according to local evangelical norms. Christians in a given socioculutural setting will develop jargon and conduct norms that indicate whether one may be estimated to be a Christian or not.

Interactional evangelists ultimately have to face that certainty of a seeker's understanding will be tentative at best. Absolute cognitive and spiritual agreement is impossible. Therefore, faith in the seeker and in God plays a key role in the evangelization process. Evangelism is the planting of spiritual seeds that may not bear fruit immediately. An interactive evangelist needs to realize that his or her salvation experience is personal. By so doing the evangelist will understand that the seeker's salvation experience will likewise be unique.

The evangelist should first seek to understand the seeker's background and context for incorporating imparted truths. The first action would therefore be getting to know the seeker personally and develop a profile of the individual. A cursory profile could be developed through questions and answers, but the best results would come through personal interaction in various settings. The seeker's sociocultural environment and worldview should be understood before the actual presentation of the Gospel is attempted. The less one knows about the seeker, the less likely success.

Scenario III

Janice is an interactive evangelist who wishes to lead Jo to accept Christ as Savior and Lord. Janice met Jo at a PTA meeting at their children's' school. In their first brief conversation Janice discovered Jo lived in her neighborhood. Jo does not attend church and does not respond to Janice's spiritual interrogative cues. Janice invites Jo over for coffee to get to know her better and to prepare to tell her about Christ.

Janice feels Jo may be considered a Christian if she realizes she is a sinner and asks God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Janice realized she will have to interact with Jo to help her understand the concepts involved in confession and accepting Christ. Janice hopes Jo will begin to interact with God. Further evidence of Jo's salvation experience will be continued interaction with Christians in the community.

Because teaching and learning precede development and maturity, Janice realizes the evangelism process will take some time. The moment of Jo's understanding will not

likely result in immediate acceptance of Christ because ideas need to take root before they can produce fruit. Speed is not necessarily desirable. If things happen too fast, Jo will not have time to interact with the truth and build lasting spiritual and cognitive associations.

Janice and Jo meet at each other's homes for coffee on a regular basis. As they become friends Janice begins to connect her understanding of Christian truths with Jo's life experiences. Jo was reared in a home with a loving father who provided well for his family. Janice also finds that Jo and her husband grieve deeply when their children disobey them and fail to meet their expectations. Jo and her husband appear to be modeling a love for their children that is similar to God's love for his children.

Janice continues to explain Christ in terms that are familiar to Jo and places God in the context of Jo's life. Jo's understanding of Christ's mission as savior solidifies as she interacts with Janice and her family. Jo also attended a women's Bible study group with Janice. Eventually she brought her family to visit Janice's church one Sunday. They were warmly welcomed by other church members.

One day over coffee Janice asked Jo to evaluate her own spiritual condition. Jo confided to Janice that she had recently confessed her sins in prayer to God and accepted Christ as her Savior and Lord. Janice explained how people in their area get involved in church and interaction with other members. Within a few weeks Jo and her family joined the church. Jo related that she had explained what she had learned about Christ to her husband and children.

Discussion

Billy Graham, in *How To Be Born Again*, describes a courtroom scene in which a seeker interacts with God regarding past events and Jesus Christ (Graham, 1977). As a result of this brief interaction the seeker becomes a Christian. Dr. Graham goes on to explain that the Christian life is a continuation of interaction between a father and an adopted child. Evangelical Christians can readily identify with this picture of the Christian life.

Interactive theory and evangelical Christianity share a mutual regard for interaction. The reason for this mutual respect is relationships. Interactive theory emphasizes the relationships in the learner and the environment that produce learning. The Christian emphasizes a life based upon relationships with God and other humans. Jesus summed up the Christian life in two relationships: Love God with your total being and love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:29-31).

Most of evangelism programs that are held in high regard by evangelicals focus on an interactive approach to evangelism. Lifestyle evangelism programs emphasize more than a rote formula for conversion and concedes more than an intellectual understanding of Jesus is desired. Interaction theory plays out in another aspect of the evangelism experience. Most ministers readily admit that the Christian life is a growth process in which development lags behind learning. The seeker accepts Christ and begins a lifelong course of spiritual learning and development.

Christianity and the church owe much of their effectiveness to interactive theory. Most church attendees come for the interaction with other Christians. If interaction ceased churches would probably disappear. People indicate a need for interaction to live normal, satisfying lives. The fastest growing churches in the world today usually account for their success in terms of membership involvement. The members are not passive and detached, but are actively interacting with members, ministers, and God through the activities of the church. Interaction is not merely a tool to understand how humans learn, but is a necessity for growth and happiness. An interactive church with interactive evangelists will probably be the church that never ceases to grow in size and quality.

Section IV: Biological Learning

Biological learning flows from a realist philosophical base rooted in science and Darwinism. This theory views learning as a scientifically explainable neural event involving the brain and nervous system. Behavioral learning theory and biological learning theory are closely linked through their natural-realist worldview. Biological

learning theory shares many of behaviorism's assumptions about humans. Cognitive abstractions are conceded to be useful models for understanding thinking processes, but are tentative at best because supporting biological evidence is inadequate. Learning takes in the balanced transmission of electronic impulses in a context of neurotransmitter chemicals and neural circuitry. As humans evolved from lower lifeforms their mental abilities increased proportionately. Humans differ from other animals only because they have adapted to the environment in more complex ways that have resulted more complex abilities.

Most biological learning theorists would probably question the notion of human spirit. To concede a human sprit the biological theorists would require concrete evidence of a "spirit" body organ and an evolutionary definition of the function of the spirit. Metaphysical phenomenon fall outside the purview of biological realism.

General Theory

Human learning is an evolutionary adaptation to the environment. Cognitive operations evolved as environmental situations became more complex. In a biological context cognition and mental functions are mechanical-chemical events. The brain is an advanced environmental computer. Genetic material and environment define each human's abilities. As the environment increases in complexity human mental abilities adapt and increase in complexity. If adaptation does not take place eventual extinction becomes an increasing possibility.

Biological theorists use behavioral, cognitive, and other theories of learning as indicators of how humans have evolved to cope with their environment. It is assumed that true learning theories can be explained in concrete, biological terms.

Once past the philosophical arguments the biological learning model attempts to discover the how learning takes place in light of neural architecture. Through the past few centuries theorists have moved from a distributionist view in which certain locations in the brain had singular faculties and abilities to a more individualistic view of neural networks.

Neural networks of brain cells communicating through electrical impulses in a chemically balanced environment concretely correlate with Piaget's abstract schema theory. Thoughts are electronic impulses that travel through the neural network igniting brain cells that jointly define an idea. Brain cells are neurons that are not unlike segments of string that communicate with one another through their ends. The ends consist of dendrites and synapses that facilitate cellular communication. Neurotransmitters are the chemical elements through which electronic impulses travel from cell to cell. Imbalances in any of the neural elements result in abnormal learning anomalies.

Biological learning theorists experiment with animals and humans to discover how the brain functions. Scientists are concerned with neural cell generation, communication, and their manipulation. Human brain waves as well as physically discernible mental activities are monitored electronically and data is being collected in an attempt to define normal functions.

Biological Learning and Christianity

Evangelical Christianity and biological learning theory appear to be irrevocably at odds over philosophical assumptions. Idealism and realism have similarities, but ultimately disagree upon the source and nature of truth. Evangelicals find natural realism and evolutionary theory difficult to swallow. However, if philosophical arguments are suspended evangelicals might agree with most of the scientific evidence regarding the brain's physical operation. These two camps might could be reconciled if each realized the other was addressing different issues from different perspectives. Biologists rarely construe their work as theological and most theologians would concede that their work is definitive biology.

Biological learning and Christianity share an interest in stress and mental discomfort. Both concede stress and discomfort inhibit learning. Evangelicals often attribute stress to sin, lack of faith, and ignorance of God. Biologists and neurophysicists define stress and tranquillity in terms of chemical and physical reactions. Christians

would advocate spiritual therapy while biological theorists would attempt to balance physical elements.

If biological theorists monitored spiritual experiences under the tolerant eye of evangelicals, they would find areas of mutual interest. The effects of a spiritual experience can be seen in the nervous system. Observable physical and chemical reactions accompany what evangelicals would consider a spiritual encounter with God. A neurobiologist might theorize the human brain could be caused to have a "spiritual" experience.

Neural Evangelism

Biological and neurophysical research of the brain are relatively new. The current state of research permits little more than educated guesses about the future of biological learning theory. Future breakthroughs in human brain and nervous system research open a myriad of possibilities. What if neurons may be transplanted intact with their "thoughts" or portions of the brain may be "rewired" or disconnected?

If all thoughts may be explained physically and chemically, then the biological learning theorist would conclude that a seeker could be caused or assisted to accept Christ through stimulating the brain while adjusting neurotransmitting chemicals. A decision to accept Christ could theoretically be induced. Under chemical influence a seeker might willingly go through the steps to accepting Christ.

Scenario IV

John is an evangelist and pharmacist. He has a friend, Jerry, is a non-believer whom he wishes would accept Christ. John decides to alter Jerry's neurotransmitting ability through the administration of a narcotic. The drug chosen produces a state of euphoria and puts the seeker in a receptive attitude.

John administers the drug and waits until Jerry is fully under its influence. Once the drug has taken effect John begins asking Jerry questions that will elicit affirmative answers. Once Jerry is in the habit of saying, "Yes" John begins the evangelism process.

John: "Is your name Jerry?"

Jerry: "Yes."

John: "Do you want to be happy?"

Jerry: "Yes."

John: "Are you happy?"

Jerry: "Yes."

John: "Are you a sinner?"

Jerry: "Yes."

John: "Do you want Jesus to forgive your sins?"

Jerry: "Yes."

John: "Do you want to accept Jesus into your life?"

Jerry: "Yes."

John: "Do you think you can fly like the angels on the filing cabinet?"

Jerry: "Yes."

Discussion

This scenario falls short of evangelical goals for obvious reasons. The seeker is responding with the correct answers, but is practically unconscious. The seeker must have control of his or her mind to consider spiritual issues. The manipulation of the seeker's will in an evangelistic setting is considered inappropriate by nearly all Christians.

Chemical evangelism is clearly out of bounds for conscientious evangelists. However, it should be noted that the brain is constantly under some sort of chemically induced state. Hormones, adrenaline, and countless other chemicals are released into the blood stream and effect human behavior. Persons who are stressed, excited, angry, afraid, drunk, or simply tired may be influenced to act abnormally. Evangelists would do well to recognize the state of seekers in an evangelistic situation and not take advantage of periods of imbalance.

Theoretical possibilities present medical and theological challenges. What happens to the spirit when the brain physically ceases to function properly? What are the spiritual implications of insanity? Might the "spiritual" part of the brain be disconnected? Might "spiritual" neurons be transplanted in the brain of a seeker?

Section V: Constructivist Theory

Constructivist theory assumes humans are not empty vessels waiting to be filled, but active organisms seeking the meaning of things around them (Driscoll, 1994). Knowledge is constructed as one lives. Humans are constantly trying to construct meaningful ideas about their environment and experiences. Reality is a personal construction and learning comes from inside the individual.

Constructivism finds its philosophical roots in existentialism. Reality comes from within the individual. No two individuals have the same view of knowledge and the world. As a child matures he or she is in the process of constructing the world through the thoughtful consideration of personal experiences.

Constructivism receives all opportunities to learn with open arms and assumes something may be learned in every instance and situation. Truths stand or are altered according to their performance in a variety of situations. Absolute truth makes absolute sense in every situation. Less reliable information is forced to adapt or adjust to fit into new contexts. Personal knowledge feeds upon previous knowledge and new situations and environments in the quest for deeper understanding.

General Theory

Knowledge is not objective, but subjective. The learner's primary goal is to mentally order his or her universe so that it makes personal sense. Individuals in a similar environment having similar experiences may or may not reach a consensus upon reality. However, constructivists have found that learners appear to seek consensus with others as a means of validating their personal perceptions. Discussion and consensus building become a key factor in group settings.

Constructivist learning seeks to use acquired knowledge in problem-solving, reasoning, and critical thinking (Driscoll, 1994). Theorists understand life as a complex set of problems that the learner seeks to decipher. The complexity of a situation causes deeper thinking and is preferred over simplistic explanations taken out of life context. Negotiation among fellow learners is encouraged so as to build consensus and to possibly learn from another person's perspective. Problems are often studied from various angles or perspectives. A juxtaposition of perspectives yields insights that might otherwise be missed. Learners are encouraged to reflect upon their own thoughts. Because personal insight and application are of tantamount importance, the student is the center of the educational experience.

The educational environment should be complex and richly stimulating. Knowledge is best discovered in the midst of life experiences, rather than isolated and taken out of context. Context is of critical importance because truth loses its meaning outside of context. Optimum learning comes from optimum exposure to a variety of information in various learning situations.

Constructivism and Christianity

Constructivist theory and Christianity are compatible if Christianity lives up to its claims. Constructivism would maintain that if Christianity is to be considered true and valid, it should out perform all other religions and surpass other ideologies based upon its own merits. The test of truth and knowledge is its ability to ring true in the context of life.

Some Christians fear other-than-Christian environments and knowledge systems because they may dissuade believers from their faith. The constructivist would encourage inquiry into other ideologies in the effort to validate or improve one's personal belief system. This challenge to Christianity is viewed with marked suspicion by most believers. It is feared exposure to other religions might encourage the seeker to choose something other than Christianity.

Constructivism also assumes one's system of beliefs, even though built in an atmosphere of consensus with others, is deeply personal and unique. Relationships are two-way encounters in which both parties shape the outcome. The seeker constructs a relationship and understanding of God based upon personal experiences and personal needs. Once a conviction has settled in it has been considered reflectively and becomes a part of the individual's psyche.

The constructivist expects God to be God and Jesus to be and do what he said he would according to the Bible. Acceptance would only come after thoughtful consideration of all the options. The conscientious evaluation and consideration of a belief system would require a review of numerous, if not all, belief systems. Faith cannot be placed in a system haphazardly.

Christianity and constructivism are probably considered either close companions or arch enemies. A constructivist evangelist would probably be among the best equipped evangelists one could imagine. However, the constructivist evangelist would expect the seeker to arrive at his or her own conclusions after much research and deep reflection.

Scenario V

Beth is a constructivist evangelist and wishes to see her friend Susan become a Christian. Beth assumes Susan will become a Christian after she examines the claims of Christianity in light of her personal experiences and an inquiry into other religious options. Beth will consider Susan a Christian when Susan informs her.

Beth: "Susan, what do you know about Christianity and Jesus Christ?"

Susan: "Not much, I believe there is a God and that's about all."

Beth: "I'm a Christian and have found that Christ is the answer in my life. I'd like to tell you about what God has done for me and let you decide if he might could be what you need. Would you think about becoming a Christian, too?"

Susan: "Sure. I'm open to what you have to say, but I can't guarantee I'll become a Christian."

Beth: "I'll let you make that decision. Just give me the chance over the next few weeks to show you how God works, okay?"

Susan: "Okay."

Beth: "Over the next month or so we are going to study and visit a lot of different places: a Jewish synagogue, a Krishna commune, a Mormon church, an Islamic temple, and a Buddhist temple. After we visit these places I want to tell you about what God has done for me and let you visit my church."

Beth and Susan begin a joint study of world religions. Susan becomes so interested in their study that she often does some research on her own. They visit the Buddhist temple twice because Susan had many questions about Buddhism that only one of the monks could address. Finally, Beth schedules their visit to her church. Before the trip, Beth relates why she is a Christian and what God had done for her.

Susan listens intently to Beth and attends church with her. She is warmly welcomed by other church members. After the church service Beth allows Susan some time to reflect about everything she has seen and heard. After some time she meets with Beth.

Beth: "Well, how do you feel about Christianity?"

Susan: "I have decided to become a Christian. After observing all the other religions and looking at my own life, I think Christ is the only one for me."

Beth: "I'm glad to hear that. I knew Christ would be the answer to your needs."

Susan: "Your right. Considering what all of the other religions have to offer and what they base their beliefs upon, I really can't see any other choice, but Christ."

Discussion

Is your church ready to take such a challenge? Constructive evangelism takes time and experienced evangelists. What sort of commitment would be expected from someone who knew what other religions had to offer and yet consciously chose Christ over the

others? Perhaps constructivist evangelism demonstrates a level of openness and faith that is rarely found among evangelical Christians.

Constructivistic Christians are not afraid of the truth nor do they seek to indoctrinate believers through less than ethical means. Non-believers have little other choice than to accept Christ when all other alternatives are exposed and shown to be inadequate. However, faith in Jesus Christ is more than a rational look at all the facts. The spiritual aspects of conversion should not be overlooked. Constructive evangelism need not be in conflict with spiritual revelation. The opportunity for revelation to take place is probably more apparent in constructive evangelism than any other method.

What if seekers decide to follow something other than Christianity? Should Christians place seekers in a position to choose something other than Christ? Perhaps Christians should "allow" seekers to work out their own beliefs and trust that God and a conscientious witness will eventually lead them to the truth.

Conclusion

Evangelism has come to be considered an essential element of modern evangelical churches. Programs for leading non-believers to Christ abound. How often do leaders and ministers evaluate these programs in terms of underlying assumptions about how humans learn and respond to instruction?

Some might say that motivation and processes are irrelevant as long as the seeker exhibits Christian conduct and goes to church. However, most would agree that evangelism focuses upon developing a godly heart from which godly actions flow. With what shall we be content? Are we satisfied with conditioned responses to evangelistic stimuli? Are we in the business of altering cognitive schemes in the minds of non-believers? Would an evangelism pill be the answer? Perhaps we should forget about programmed evangelism all together and rely upon personal interaction to lead seekers to Christ. Dare we expose seekers to all religions and let each person make his or her own decision based upon the evidence?

As answers to the previous questions are formulated consideration should be given to how much and how little we know about human learning. All the learning theories supply insight into good and bad evangelism goals and methods. Conscientious evangelism considers all the ways a seeker learns and incorporates new knowledge. In the final analysis a well-balanced evangelism program would do well to recognize and acknowledge various aspects of all the theories. As in most aspects of life it would appear that the truth is not to be found in the extremes, but somewhere in the middle.

What motivates a person to become a Christian? A consideration of how humans learn may help ministers and others identify weaknesses in their current programs. A sound evangelism program does not manipulate the seeker of take advantage of his or her weaknesses. The goal of the evangelist is to conscientiously let God, who created humans, do his work in the hearts and minds of men and women.

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